



**The Joy of All Who Sorrow  
Our Panagia Who Celebrates July 23.**

The origin of the Russian Icon of the Mother of God “the Joy of All Who Sorrow” is uncertain. It is not known whether it, like many other Russian icons, was derived from a Byzantine prototype. We do know that this Icon was in Kiev at a very early date. What was apparently her oldest icon, “The Joy of all Who Sorrow,” was located near the Monastery of the Caves in Kiev (Kievo-Pechersky Lavra) in the church of the hospital founded in 1106 by Saint Nikola Svyatosha (the Saintly), great-grandson of Yaroslavl the Wise. It is quite possible that the icon was placed there by the Saint himself.

An old tradition states that this icon was responsible for miraculous healings at a very early date. It is related that a gatekeeper several times saw a Lady going into the hospital at night and noticed that after each such visit some patient would have received healing. Astonished by this, the gatekeeper asked who this Lady might be. They replied that it was someone unknown to them who, when asked her name, simply stated, “I am the joy of all who sorrow.”



One night the gatekeeper followed the Lady on one of her visits, which to the cell of a monk who was fatally ill. There, on the wall over the bed of the dying monk, he saw the icon of the Mother of God and realized for the first time the true identity of the nocturnal visitor. This monk was also healed.

Many other miraculous icons of “The Joy of All Who Sorrow” were in existence before the 1700’s, and the very name of the Icon became a magnet for those suffering from every kind of affliction. One of the oldest of these Icons was located in a prison in the town of Vologda and occupied a place in every Church procession in that town after the year 1522. Another Icon in Tsarko Selo was noted for the healing of the mentally ill; one in Pskov, for healing of diseased eyes; one in Tver, for miraculous help during an epidemic of cholera; one in Tobolsk, for protection of fishermen and merchants. In Perm, west of the Ural Mountains, there a monastery was dedicated to this Icon.

The main feast day of the Icon in Russia is celebrated October 24. This date was established in the year 1648 on the occasion of a miraculous healing by an Icon in the city of Moscow. The Patriarch of Moscow, Ioakim, had a sister, Evfimia, who suffered from a deep wound in her side. Expecting to die, she nevertheless did not lose hope in God’s help, and in answer to her prayer to our Panagia from the depths of her heart, Evfimia heard a voice saying, “Evfimia, why do you not turn in your suffering to the Lady who heals all?” “But where can I find such a healer?” cried Evfimia. Then Evfimia heard, “My Icon is the church of the Transfiguration of my Son; it is called ‘The Joy of All Who Sorrow’. Call a priest from the church where my Icon is kept, and after he has served a moleben with the blessing of water, you will be healed. And then do not forget my mercy to you, and confess it for the glory of my name.” All was done as the voice had indicated, and Evfimia was indeed healed on October 24. From that time forward, this Icon has been commemorated in Russia on that date.

The more recent popularity of “The Joy of All Who Sorrow” comes from the miracles performed by another one of her icons found in a chapel near a glass factory just outside Saint Petersburg. On July 23, 1888, during a severe thunderstorm when lightning struck this chapel it burned or singed everything inside, including all the other icons, but leaving our Panagia’s icon unsinged. Her icon slid to the floor from the shock given by the bolt of lightning, but the icon of Our Panagia, which had been darkened from age and soot, was renewed and her icon suddenly shone as bright as

new. The violent disturbance also broke open the poor-box and twelve small copper coins stuck to the icon in various places; afterwards many miracles were worked by the grace of the holy icon. These coins are always displayed on copies of this particular icon.

The miraculous preservation and restoration of the icon sent waves of joy and wonder throughout the city of Saint Petersburg. From the early morning of the next day the burned chapel was surrounded by a multitude of the faithful who were caught up in an awesome rapture of amazement by this sign of divine mercy. At noon of that day the first moleben was served before the marvelously renewed icon. Afterwards, as the news spread throughout Russia, people dropped everything as they rushed to pray before the icon. The faithful thronged to our Panagia's icon and miraculous healings were worked everywhere by the Lord's uncreated power. The Emperor Alexander III, after himself coming to venerate the icon, donated property and erected a stone church dedicated to the icon. This church was consecrated in 1898. The icon is commemorated by the Church on the date of its renewal, July 23.



The icon at the head of this paper is similar to the one located in the Cathedral church in San Francisco, "The Joy of All Who Sorrow." It is written according to the rules prescribed by traditional iconography which make full use of the mystical language of the Orthodox Church. This disciplined art form makes it possible to express the full range and depth of uncreated iconographic power entrusted to the Church with the greatest economy of means.

Our Panagia is shown in this icon without her Son and our God with her hands opened wide after the manner of the celebrated icon of the "Protection" (*Pokrov*). In her right hand she holds a scepter, an emblem of sovereignty. She is the reigning Queen of Heaven and Earth, enthroned in glory. Heaven is indicated not only by the gold background of the icon, but also by this icon's most striking feature: the flowers. Obviously, these are not the flowers of this world, for they are the blossoms of an entirely new creation—these are the flowers of paradise. Even in such a detail as this sacred iconography raises our minds above all things earthly and offers us a foretaste of the Kingdom of God.

Although our Panagia is in the Kingdom of God, she is also near to us. Once again, the way iconography works lets us stand in the Kingdom of God with her, and lets her stand with us in this life, just as we are. Every icon draws us in to itself; this is the arresting, summoning power of Orthodox iconography. So we see, and inwardly relish,

the rush of standing in a doorway to heaven, a door open to an eternity within ourselves. We also stand awestruck as her hand radiantly beckons us to embrace the freshness of powers, miracles, and thresholds which surpassing our natural abilities to grasp them. Orthodox iconography holds the keys to these two doors, both created by our Orthodox baptism: the one within the soul and the other door leading us up and out, as the words with which Saint Gregory Palamas closed his life indicate, “to the heights!”

Our Panagia hears our appeals to her mercies, and responds to them as the Mother of God. As god after God, there is nothing that she cannot do; no path is closed to her. On both sides of the icon appear different groups of the afflicted with banners in Slavonic pleading for her help as the staff of old age, for clothing and warmth for the naked, for food and medicine for the hungry and sick, for her to supply her own joy for the suffering, for her prayers for the offended, as well as for her companionship in our travels. She, as our God’s Mother, is without question, “all things to all men”. Amen.

The iconography used in this icon is unique for our Panagia. At the top and to the left is the sun, to the right is the moon. These two bodies often appear in icons of our Saviour’s Crucifixion, but rarely in one of her icons. Nothing in creation, however, is loftier than is she. Her sovereignty is unequalled; her intercession, upon the mere nod of her head, opens any door, and shuts any door. She has her Son and our God’s ear at all hours of the day and of the night. Her intercessions never fail to yield the desired result. Her Son is delighted when we plead with her for her help. Once again, there is simply nothing that she cannot do.

At the top center of her Icon stands our Saviour, and hers, as God Almighty, by Whom all things are created and are upheld “by the word of His power.”<sup>1</sup> He is the Ruler of All: He is the one from Whom our Panagia derives her sovereignty.<sup>2</sup>



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<sup>1</sup> Heb. 1:3

<sup>2</sup> The material above, except for the Icon on page 1, is taken from *The Orthodox Word*, January-February, 1965, pp. 24-29 [Virtual Parish Ed.] © 1965 by Orthodox Christian Books and Icons

*Dismissal Hymn of the Mother of God, Joy of All that Sorrow. Fourth Tone*

**T**o God's Birthgiver let us run now most earnestly, we sinners all and wretched ones, and fall prostrate in repentance, calling from the depths of our souls: Lady, come unto our aid, have compassion on us; hasten thou, for we are lost in a throng of transgressions; turn not thy servants away with empty hands, for thee alone do we have as our only hope.

*Kontakion of the Mother of God, Joy of All that Sorrow  
Plagal of Second Tone*

**W**E have no other help, we have no other hope, but thee, O Sovereign Lady; do thou help us. In thee do we hope, and of thee do we boast, for we are thy servants. Let us not be put to shame.

